The Joys and Challenges of Teaching Outside Your Comfort Zone

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By the end of today’s luncheon…

What’s it like to teach outside your comfort zone?

What does the research say?

How can you make it work?

“Teaching outside your comfort zone”

• New material
• Relearning legacy material that’s not your specialty
• Theory | Methods | Applications
• “Content novice”

By the end of today’s luncheon…

Why?

• Broad discipline
• Changing discipline
• Small department
• Keep your job / “why I was hired”
• Introductory courses
• Prevent boredom
• General education courses
• Topic you want to learn
• Budget

(HUSTON, 2012; ZAKRAJSEK, 2004)
Think of two topics (or courses) you’ve taught

Outside your comfort zone?

Center of your comfort zone?

Describe

In pairs

Your two experiences
(2 min per person)

Given your experience…

• What are disadvantages of teaching outside your comfort zone?
• Advantages?

How do content novices teach?

Good News

More accurate estimates:
• time on task
• task difficulty
• first-timer’s mistakes

Offer more concrete explanations

Use student-friendly examples

Bad News

Use fewer abstract concepts

• Makes it harder to transfer ideas to new problems

Strategies

1. Take control of the choices you can
2. Tell someone you’re still learning
3. Talk with a content expert
4. Focus on student misconceptions

(HINDS, 1999; HINDS, PATTERSON, PFEFFER, 2001; LOEWENSTEIN, MOORE, & WEBER, 2006)
Common Sources of Anxiety

- Workload & time management
- Handling questions in class
- Credibility

Workload & Time Management

Three questions

- Focuses your class prep
- “By the end of today’s class…”

Strategies you use?

Teaching on the edge of your expertise is:

- hard
- more common than we think
- more manageable and effective if you approach it right
- something we can talk about

Selected References


